

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



February 24, 2016

## The Fourth QCG Meeting

The fourth meeting of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) took place in Kabul yesterday. The group consists of Afghanistan, Pakistan, US and China and it was formed to prepare for the direct talks between Taliban and Afghan government. Three earlier meetings that took place in Islamabad and Kabul had already made some improvements in the process and the basic roadmap to the direct talks was almost completed in the fourth meeting.

For Afghanistan this peace talks seem to be really imperative. If there is any lasting peace in the country, it will only be possible through negotiations with Taliban; there is no other option. Especially fighting is no more an option as it has already led to myriads of killings and destruction. However, the important factor is that Afghan government should be able to have a comprehensive strategy regarding how to proceed in talks with Taliban.

Afghanistan earlier pursued the efforts for reconciliation process with Taliban through High Peace Council (HPC); however, the Council was not able to acquire the desired results. There were many occasions when the Council was betrayed by Taliban and on certain other occasions their members were targeted by insurgents. Thus, presently, the Council seems to have lost its true role and position and even it does not get much funding. Nevertheless, there are efforts being made to reform the Council - change its key position holders and bring about certain changes in the way it functions.

In this regard, President Ashraf Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah introduced the new High Peace Council leader Pir Sayed Ahmad Gailani on Wednesday February 23, 2016 and President Ghani in his address said that the HPC would from now on work independently. He also said that no one should doubt government's resolve to secure national interests and that no one should doubt the National Unity Government's commitment to the peace process. HPC would meet soon to set out a priority framework and that government will take action accordingly.

It is really vital that HPC should be able to bring about important changes in its structure and its functions; however, it is also vital that it should be true representative of all the Afghans. All the stakeholders must be given voice in the Council and they should be heard properly. All the ethnicities must be given representations and at the same time women should also be given enough representation in the Council. Peace can only be achieved if the participating representatives from both the sides truly and entirely represent their people.

Afghanistan should take advantage of the change in the scenario, and must strive to pursue its main objectives. The important achievement for the Afghan government would be to make Taliban ready for a peace process and negotiate for a cease-fire. If Taliban get ready for a cease-fire it would mean that they are really ready for negotiations. No peace process can succeed unless the clashes stop and the parties in the war are ready to lay down their arms. In addition as Afghanistan has spring and summer seasons ahead there are possibilities of rise in insurgency by Taliban. Therefore, a cease-fire before that would be a great achievement and would be great news for the common masses as they have been suffering from the offensive to a large extent.

Another important factor for Afghanistan would be to convince Taliban to accept Afghan constitution, which seems a bit difficult as Taliban have always strived for a Shariah-based law in the country. It is really a Herculean task to make them ready to respect Afghan constitution and abandon their demand for a Shariah-based law as they are gaining strength on the battle-ground. They are even insisting on their own terms and conditions for the peace talks. However, for Afghan government, it would be a great loss if it compromises on its constitution which is result of years of struggle for a democratic system and for which the Afghan people and the soldiers have given large number of sacrifices.

It is also important that the voices of important figures, who represent different political or religious groups, should be heard. Former Jihadi figure Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf has said that Afghan Mujahideen support any attempt which can broker sustainable peace and bring an end to ongoing violence, but has urged that Afghanistan's political geography should not be undermined at any cost in the process. Nevertheless, there should be consideration that the voices must not undermine Afghanistan's national interests.

Afghanistan, as a top priority, needs to reach to a conclusive position regarding terrorism, if it wants to continue its journey towards a democratic and peaceful state. President Ashraf Ghani had clearly indicated that he is serious about the issue and has always called for a regional and global cooperation to eradicate terrorism. Nonetheless, it is more important that Afghanistan must have its own strategy bold and clear regarding the issue and must follow the same through actions, not words alone, as there is no more time for words.

## Is the High Peace Council Sidelined?

By Abdul Ahad Bahrami

With the four-nation peace initiative set to bring the Taliban into peace negotiations, the government has announced appointment of new authorities to lead the Afghan High Peace Council (HPC). According to the reports, Sayed Ahmad Gilani has been appointed as the head of the council and former vice president Mohammad Karim Khalili along with some others have been appointed as the deputies of the government peace body. The move is coming at a time when the peace efforts are entering a new phase with the four-way coordination group - comprised of Afghanistan, Pakistan, US and China - setting to kick-start formal peace talks with the Taliban. However, the main question is about the role the peace council would play in the future peace talks that would probably be led by the four-nation coordination group.

The appointments suggest that the government is considering a role for the HPC in the peace future peace talks. The peace body representing the government was formed by former president Hamid Karzai in 2010 to bring the Taliban leaders into peace negotiations and oversee the would-be talks. The HPC, however, has been largely viewed to have failed in making any progress to bring the Taliban into table of peace negotiations and setting a mechanism for ending the conflict through peace talks. The high peace council has been largely criticized for some blunders it made, or happened, that had considerable impacts on shaping its failures.

The recent efforts of the national unity government to start negotiations with the Taliban have been largely relying on Pakistan's supportive role and the four-way mechanism to prepare a roadmap and oversee the process one it starts. The recent efforts, however, have been overwhelmingly praised for bringing about a consensus and setting a cooperation mechanism for key regional and world players. The government did not go through the HPC to pave the ground for peace talks, instead it started from Islamabad and established the four-nation mechanism.

In the recent efforts, the HPC did not have a noticeable role. Even in the crucial meetings that were held in Kabul and Islamabad, the absence of the peace council was obvious. This and the ineffectiveness of the peace council in its peace efforts resulted to speculations over the role of the HPC in possible future talks with the Taliban. As the four-nation coordination group was holding meetings to tailor a peace roadmap, there were speculations that the High Peace Council is sidelined in the peace efforts. In addition, the HPC also had its budget cut by the international community which was another sign of troubles for the council.

The recent appointments suggest that the government is reviving the peace council and considering a new but somehow marginal role for it in the main peace process. The HPC is made-up of high-profile former government officials, senior ethnic and jihadi leaders

and other political leaders. The HPC brings together a large spectrum of Afghan politicians to play a role as participants of possible peace talks in the future. It is believed that a main motive for former president Hamid Karzai to establish the high peace council was to appease the many influential political and jihadi figures by considering political and economic concessions for them. This was always part of the former president's politics of patronage.

However, President Ghani's expectations from the HPC would definitely not the same as Hamid Karzai. Ghani has been largely known as opposing to considering ceremonial roles as political concessions for the politicians. However, realities on the ground are always bound to change politicians' approaches. President Ghani knows well that he needs political cohesion and a national consensus in the country to promote his peace plan. In addition, he has learned lessons from last two years. Initially, the president pursued his own peace plans through Pakistan largely without seeking endorsement of the Afghan political spectrum. He took the initiative in his hand and actively pursued his agenda. Due to this, some of his bold overtures to Pakistan in hope of the country's help in the process met fierce resistance at home and forced him to backtrack on many of his initiatives to advance his peace initiative.

When the Afghan government sits on the table of negotiations with the Taliban, it would need to sell its peace plans and agreements to the public and the political community in the country. The government would not be able to reach a peace deal with the Taliban without promoting a national consensus and seeking endorsement of the country's political spectrum. According to government officials, President Ashraf Ghani has expressed hope in a meeting over the recent appointments that the new leadership of the HPC would promote and create political and national consensus by help of the past experiences and based on the peace roadmap. The president has not talked about any specific task for the peace council in leading the peace process.

It is clear enough that the government has now defined a different role for the HPC. The HPC would play a supportive role in the process by seeking national consensus and political cohesion over the peace process. It is obvious that the initiative of the high peace council was an absolute failure. In fact, the HPC cannot be a body to be able to bring the Taliban on the table of negotiations and negotiate a peace deal with the militants. The current peace efforts seem to be in the right direction with the four-nation initiative set to lead the supposed peace talks. However, there is a lot to be done at national level to forge consensus over the peace process. It is hoped that the high peace council would be able to play a supportive role and be as a stage for promoting political consensus over the peace process.

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## The Terrorism of Child Abuse

By Dr. Faisal Ali

Exclusive for the Daily Outlook  
Afghanistan

The history of mankind has experienced incessant petrifying and pestilential stories of child abuse. The imps of this sinister have stupefied the whole world because the children are the source of beauty and future's human capital of a nation.

The probity of the humanity of orb even in the present age has failed shamefully and miserably to curb the preponderance of actors of this evil permanently. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child ennobled the obligations of the states for the wastrels in 1989 but the poignant situation still prevails with unprecedented proportion that has hemmed in the planet with a new mode of terrorism. Today the children of the world are in need of vaunted panaceas that can bring respite to their present and evolve a bright future for them.

The molestation of children in surreptitious way is a rampant phenomenon throughout the globe. In Pakistan, 6 children per day suffer the pangs of sexual abuse according to Sahil (an NGO).

The leading groups that are playing pivotal role in child abuse are acquaintances and teachers. Commercial sexual exploitation of children in Pakistan is a perfunctory affair.

In 2003, the media of Pakistan unraveled the news of sexual abuse and commercial prostitution of the students of Government Higher Secondary School No. 3, Peshawar by a gang of teachers for over two decades. Due to non existence of immaculate and limpid justice system, the whole story became dormant after a few days with vitiated repercussions.

The opprobrium of child abuse is also found in United States of America (USA) where 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6

boys are sexually abused before the age of 18 according to NCA, 2008. The acts of some pedophile clergymen throughout the globe have also been an incremental source of holocaust and inferno to the heart-rending scenario.

The minimization and beating the perils of child abuse demand both long term and short term plans.

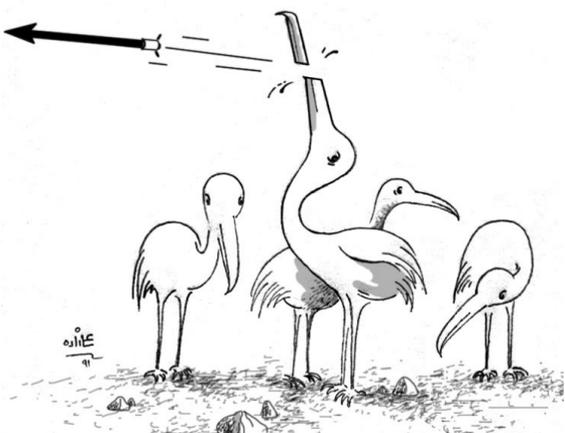
The establishment of child protection tribunals at primary level in each and every country would be a great leap forward in this regard. The imposition of death sentence for abusers should be introduced throughout the globe without any procrastination.

The crime investigative departments of various nations should sow the seeds of anti child abuse wings inside their respective secret organizations. These wings should be tasked with intelligence gathering and total elimination of child sexual abusers and criminals of incest from the face of the earth. The joint family system should be abolished in those communities in which the prevalence and incidence of child abuse are frequent. Furthermore, the culture of appointing female teachers in primary schools for imparting education should be promulgated and propagated throughout the globe.

Lastly, the states that have ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) but have failed to protect their children from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse should be tried in International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC) for flouting the norms of International Law. Protection of children is upheld as sacrosanct by each and every charter and ideology.

The world community and philanthropists must come forward to eliminate the atmosphere of claustrophobia and agoraphobia for children so that the tomorrow of today is free of gory details.

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